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TEMPORALITY AND MEANINGFUL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

Temporality is an under-researched area in entrepreneurship and business ethics, even though entrepreneurs are particularly affected by increases in the pace of working life. How do they position themselves in relation to the acceleration of time in order to construct meaning for their activity? We draw on fifty-four semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs to outline the different ways in which they perceive a faster pace of work. We show how the meaning they give to their activity varies according to whether they accept, participate in, or resist the acceleration of time: (1) By claiming to accept a high work rate, entrepreneurs may see work as a way of keeping busy, having fun, or forgetting; (2) by declaring that they actively participate in the fast pace of work, they see entrepreneurial activity as a means of achieving success and efficiency; (3) by asserting that they resist the acceleration of time, they view work as a way of setting ethical goals, doing their job better, experiencing unexpected encounters, or being creative. These different perspectives on time and meaning are not incompatible: It is possible that achieving a harmonic balance between periods of acceleration and deceleration of time may foster the construction of meaningful entrepreneurship.

Keywords

Acceleration of time, deceleration of time, meaningful work, meaningful entrepreneurship, temporality.

TEMPORALITY AND MEANINGFUL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

And so we ought to understand that what we struggle with is the fault, not of the places, but of ourselves; when there is need of endurance, we are weak, and we cannot bear toil or pleasure or ourselves or anything very long.

Seneca, *On Tranquility of Mind* (Latin: *De Tranquillitate Animi*), 60 AD.

Time, which Lévesque and Stephan (2020, p. 163) define as “a dimension in which events can be ordered from the past through the present into the future,” has been somewhat neglected in business ethics literature. With the exception of a consideration of irresponsible short-termist views (Bansal and Des Jardine 2014), this lack of theorization of time, or temporality, has been subject to criticism (Slawinski and Bansal 2012; Holt and Johnsen 2019), which recent calls for journal papers have sought to address: the ‘Boredom at Work’ special issue of *Organization* in 2020 and the ‘Ethics and Temporality’ special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* in 2021.

This dearth of temporality research is all the more surprising since recent philosophical literature has denounced the increased pace of work and a production economy without limits. Virilio (1986) underlines that speed occupies a predominant place in our representation of reality and will end up constituting reality itself, even though it marks a disconnection from the world, from others, and from oneself. Similarly, the German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa (2013, 2019), who analyzes temporal famine, that is, the constant anxiety concerning lack of time, observes that the pursuit of technological innovation and the experience of acceleration may weaken resonance, which is a qualitative relationship between the subject and the world. This acceleration in the pace of life is defined by that author as an

increase in quantity per unit of time (Rosa 2013), amplified by an acceleration of goal-directed processes and an increasing rate of sociocultural transformation (Rosa et al. 2017). He denounces such frenzy as a structural feature of late modernity that relies on growth and innovation to maintain and reproduce its structure.

This condition affects all organizations that are exposed to increasing productivity demands and which focus on accomplishing quantitative and visible tasks in a fairly short period of time (Pirson 2017). This phenomenon is reflected in a scientification and rationalization of work (and time) (Annosi et al. 2016) that reinforces the feeling of not having enough time, or even, as Baudrillard (1998) has argued, the sense of being deprived of free time, that is, of the possibility of wasting time or spending it on non-productive activity. This awareness of frenzy does not lead to an appreciation of slowness (Rosa 2013), but rather to the promotion of a musicology, an intelligence of rhythms, or a harmonic balance with accelerations and decelerations (Virilio 1986).

Entrepreneurship is no exception to this experience: On the contrary, entrepreneurs whose businesses are inherently intense and constantly changing (Magdinceva-Spova et al. 2016) are particularly concerned with the fast pace of work and feel that time is the “most valuable and scarcest resource of all” (Zachary et al. 2015, p. 1402).

Yet, with the exception of studies on long-term orientation in family businesses (Lumpkin and Brigham 2011; Sharma et al. 2013; Pieper et al. 2020), the issue of temporality has been rather neglected in research on entrepreneurship and business ethics. Only the study by Lévesque and Stephan (2020) mentions the particularity of the perception of time in this sector of activity, stating that entrepreneurs may sometimes suffer from a fast work pace without having the desire, need, or strength to change their relationship to time.

Our research aligns with this study by focusing on the link between the perception of time acceleration and the construction of meaningfulness at work: How do entrepreneurs who are

particularly affected by the culture of acceleration and immediacy manage their relationship to time in order to give meaning to their work activity? To answer this question, we conducted fifty-four semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs to examine how they talk about their work rhythm. We observe that almost all of them feel that they lack time in their entrepreneurial activity.

We contribute to business ethics literature on the interactions between temporality and meaningful work by revealing that entrepreneurs give a different meaning to their activity depending on how they position themselves in relation to the acceleration of time. Some discourses reflect an acceptance, even participation in an accelerated pace of work; other discourses manifest a resistance to the acceleration of time and a willingness to spend time on developing a qualitative relationship to work.

The article is organized as follows. In the first section, we review existing studies on temporality in the organizational context, focusing on different time and meaning perspectives. The second section describes the methodology of our empirical study, explaining how the data were collected and analyzed. In the third section, we show that the construction of meaning differs according to the ways in which entrepreneurs position themselves in relation to the acceleration of time. The final section highlights our theoretical contribution to business ethics literature on temporality and meaningful entrepreneurship.

Literature Review

As Michaelson et al. (2014, p. 78) note, “although meaningful work represents a topic of important concern for business ethics scholars and organizational scholars, there has been little cross-fertilization between these two disciplines in this regard.” The concept of meaningful work has been given little attention in business ethics studies that recognize the complexity and

richness of the concept of meaning (Bowie 1998; Ciulla 2000; Michaelson et al. 2014; Yeoman 2014) but which are mainly focused on the ethical prerequisites that enable workers to find meaningful work. Similarly, ethics have tended to be neglected in the standard constructions of meaning that attempt to deliver a fixed categorization of the components and conditions of meaningful work, while risking losing sight of the subjective experience of meaning. By highlighting the features of work and the working environment, the coherence between expected and perceived work characteristics (Isaksen 2000; Morin 2008), or the sources of meaningful work (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Lips-Wiersma and Morris 2009), some studies agree that individuals are inclined to give meaning to their work when they perceive it as useful to others, helpful in developing the quality of relationships with others, or contributing to personal development (Berthoin Antal et al. 2018). By focusing on the factors or components of meaning, previous research has largely neglected the process by which meaningful work or meaningfulness is constructed.

There are several reasons for the lack of business ethics studies on meaning-making mechanisms. First, meaningful work is too often considered as a state of satisfaction. Finding work meaningful may be an emotional, even uncomfortable experience because it reaches beyond the workplace and into the realm of the individual's wider personal life. Second, while meaningful work tends to be reduced to a fixed experience, it results from an ongoing process: Meaning-making shifts over time, depending on personal and professional circumstances, and cannot give rise to a steady state of achievement (Florian et al. 2019). It is true that meaningful work involves both retrospective and global judgments (Allan et al. 2019). Yet, as Mitra and Buzzanell (2017, p. 612) point out, "participants' meaning-making of work was constantly in flux, rather than a static frame, shaped by the constraints facing them." Third, meaningful work is sometimes presented as the combination of a number of objective conditions. The convergence of the classical components of meaning, such as learning and development

opportunities, autonomy, recognition, positive relationships, and social purpose, does not guarantee the experience of making meaning, which implies a retrospective ability to make connections between achievements and a wider sense of the meaning of life (Bailey and Madden 2016). Workers may also find work meaningful even when most of the components of meaning are absent. Bunderson and Thompson (2009, p. 40) note that meaningful work constitutes “a double-edged sword” for some workers, for whom the idea of meaningfulness “infuses even the most trivial and unpleasant tasks with transcendent meaning and significance,” making them forget inadequate pay, physically demanding work, unsafe working conditions, and strains on their personal relationships beyond the workplace.

Recent research on meaningful work (Bailey and Madden 2016; Ahn et al. 2017; Mitra and Buzzanell 2017; Bailey et al. 2019) invites us to free ourselves from the “components lens” (Mitra and Buzzanell 2017, p. 596) and explore the dynamics of meaning, that is, the processes by which people experience an “authentic connection between their work and a broader transcendent life purpose beyond the self” (Bailey and Madden 2016, p. 2). We argue that time perspectives, particularly the perception of the acceleration of time, could form part of the process by which an individual gives meaning to work.

Acceleration of time and meaningfulness

In general, capitalist society is marked by an acceleration in the pace of working life and by an increasing quest for productivity, causing stress and alienation (Pirson 2017). Baudrillard (1998) talks about the logical impossibility of free time, expressing regret that time is mostly subjected to the demands of production. If, for the philosopher, free time is often restricted, then how much more is working time likely to be subject to productivist constraints? The meaning of work itself is subordinated to this same logic, that is, to our ability to produce goods

and services, to deliver informational content, to eliminate idle time, and to chase away boredom.

It is hardly surprising that boredom, the merits of which have been praised in psychological literature (Mann and Cadman 2014; Park et al. 2019), is perceived as a negative, reprehensible, even dangerous experience for organizations (Tsai 2016), as it constitutes “a serious impediment to organizational efficiency and innovation” (Butler et al. 2011, p. 332). The boredom referred to here may be described in pejorative terms as a negative, “unpleasant” (Loukidou et al. 2009, p. 383), and even meaningless experience (Barbalet 1999; Goodstein 2005; Svendsen 2005; Johnsen 2016), linked to the diffuse feeling that time seems to stand still, constitutes an empty interval, or reveals something lacking.

Since, within organizations, boredom is often associated with harmful inertia for both the structure and for the individuals (Watson et al. 1988; Wiesner et al. 2005; Loukidou et al. 2009), managers may be tempted to eliminate it by increasing workloads and diversifying tasks (Fisher 1993; Tsai 2016). Workers themselves may opt for an accelerated pace of work and the relentless pursuit of speed, innovation, and novelty in order to escape this unpleasant effect: “Boredom often merely disappears into the kind of distractions that may lead to new forms of organized productivity (becoming more avid consumers or more zealous advocates of illusion), or that may just be malicious and destructive” (Johnsen 2016, p. 3). Therefore, members of an organization may deliberately choose frenzied activity at work in order to escape boredom and a weakening in the meaning of their activity.

Deceleration of time and meaningfulness

A state of frenzy is not the only option within business firms: On the contrary, members of an organization may consider the deceleration of time as a positive, transient, and short-lived

experience (Fisher 1993), an opportunity for deeper learning and transformation (Carroll et al. 2010), and even an invitation to think about the purpose of work in a different way (Barbalet 1999). Indeed, the creation of meaning is not only an active process by which we choose to give meaning to all the tasks we perform, or to certain components of our work (Allan et al. 2019; Yeoman et al. 2019), but it may also be the result of a passive process in which meaning is received and revealed during periods of suspended frenzy (Palmer 2000). In other words, giving meaning to one's work may presuppose the prior and specific act of receiving meaning from one's experiences, which implies periods of suspension from the state of frenzy. Frémeaux and Pavageau (2020) explain how reviewing the past may help workers identify experiences that make sense to them, in order to be able to repeat them in the future.

Although favorable to the construction of meaning, this time when frenzy is suspended may appear boring in some ways. For this reason, Johnsen (2016, p. 2) provides a positive perspective on boredom as “a kind of restless dissatisfaction, an agitated protest that reacts against this loss”. This perspective is inspired by Barbalet (1999), who sees boredom as “imperative toward meaning” (p. 633) and defends the idea that boredom “is a restless and irritable feeling which sets in train a process leading to curiosity, invention and associated activities in which ... meaningfulness in activity and circumstance are sought” (p. 641). Johnsen (2016) thus distinguishes between boredom and depression: While depression may be analyzed exclusively as a loss of meaning, boredom is both a negative and a positive experience whereby “human needs in organizational life gradually become desires and rise to the surface of everyday life” (Johnsen 2016, p. 11). This type of boredom may be a painful but fruitful experience in which meaningful moments are identified and reiterated. From this perspective, Butler et al. (2011, p. 333), based on an article by Sloterdijk (2009, p. 248), invite us “to relearn the ‘art of boredom’ in modern-day organizations,” which we believe is an act of taming the deceleration of time and giving meaning to one's work.

Temporality in entrepreneurship research

Perceptions of time acceleration and time crunch are frequently mentioned in entrepreneurship research (Zachary et al. 2015), but vary according to the time perspectives adopted by entrepreneurs (Lévesque and Stephan 2020), that is, “their cognitive processes partitioning human experiences into past, present, and future temporal frames” (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999, p. 1271). It may be, as Lévesque and Stephan (2020) demonstrate, that some entrepreneurs endure the present without being able to influence it (the present-fatalistic time perspective). Even if they recognize that they lack time, they feel overwhelmed by the demands of the present and are unable to change their circumstances to a slower pace. This phenomenon, called “time pressure” by the authors, and which they contrast with “time affluence,” is linked to entrepreneurial choices. Indeed, Lévesque and Stephan (2020) suggest that poor time management may cause time pressure, that is, “the need to accelerate the pace of time to get more things done within the same period of time,” whereas effective time management may be the source of an “experience of decelerated pace of time—a sense of time affluence whereby individuals feel that they have enough time to pursue what they find meaningful” (Lévesque and Stephan 2020, p. 167).

Thus, it may be that the meaning given to entrepreneurial activity is closely linked to the perception and management of time. Just as Frémeaux and Pavageau (2020) use the term ‘meaningful leadership’ to describe the specific processes of meaning-making for leaders, we propose to talk about ‘meaningful entrepreneurship’ in order to consider how entrepreneurs construct the meaning of their activity. The processes through which they achieve this may have specific features because they face acceleration in different areas: technical, social change, and working life (Rosa et al. 2017). The issue we address in this study is how entrepreneurs’ meaning-making is related to how they deal with the acceleration of time.

Methods

Sample, data collection, and interview protocol

Our study was conceived to provide an exploratory account of the experience of the acceleration of time from the perspective of entrepreneurs. To do so, we focus on case studies informed by the life stories of entrepreneurs who have identified a business opportunity and deployed the necessary resources required for its exploitation. Such a methodological approach is considered appropriate for investigating the perception of time because entrepreneurs are particularly affected by an increasingly fast pace of working life. They have escaped the temporality inherent in the bureaucratic environment of large companies (Rothlin and Werder 2008; Butler et al. 2011; Kiliç et al. 2020) and become what Knight (1983) calls corporate refugees. They are also more likely to experience what the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) labels “flow,” that is, a highly focused mental state conducive to productivity coupled with a forgetfulness of other aspects of work. In other words, although characterized by a heterogeneous identity (Steyaert and Hjorth 2007), entrepreneurship is often experienced as a never-ending quest for change (Magdinceva-Spova et al. 2016).

We conducted semi-structured interviews with fifty-four entrepreneurs between February 2017 and March 2018. Our article adopts a traditional entrepreneurship perspective, identifying the entrepreneur as the individual taking the overall risk to organize activity: Two-thirds of our interviewees had taken over an existing business, while one-third had started a new one. Selected from business incubator and business network databases, all the interviewees were graduates of engineering and business schools with experience of working in large companies.

They all operated in the same region, thereby ensuring similar territorial anchoring and limited environmental factor variances.

We used a heterogeneous sampling approach in terms of the number of years they had spent as an entrepreneur, their gender, age, and sector of activity: Twenty-three of the interviewees had been entrepreneurs for more than eight years; nine were women; the age range was twenty-six to sixty-four years old; the companies operated in sectors as diverse as manufacturing, logistics, construction, commerce, services, health, and humanitarian aid. Table 1 presents the main sample characteristics.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Each interview took an average of approximately one hundred minutes. Using a semi-structured interview guide, we began with two open-ended questions: What led you to start or take over a business? What meaning do you give to your work? We prepared follow-up questions to obtain additional information on respondents' experiences as entrepreneurs: What is the history of your company? What are your sources of inspiration as an entrepreneur? Who were the key people and what were the key events? How do you see the future of your business? The interviewees produced fragmented and paradoxical discourses that we chose to recount through a narrative thematic approach (Boje 2001).

Data analysis

We recorded and transcribed all the interviews, resulting in a total data set of 724,897 words, which we then approached with one broad question in mind: How do respondents position themselves in relation to the acceleration of time when asked about the meaning of their

activity? The interviewers did not address the theme of temporality, but the interviewees spontaneously examined it at length.

We applied a thematic coding process (Boyatzis 1998), through which we independently reviewed the transcripts and generated a list of conceptual categories. As suggested by Tracy (2013), we conducted a two-phase process of data analysis. First, we thematically sorted all responses in which interviewees described how they had constructed the meaning of their entrepreneurial activity. Once confident that we had grasped the different meanings conveyed by the participants, we examined how they spontaneously highlighted a connection between time perspectives and meaningful work. We concentrated on extracts in which interviewees explained that the meaning of their activity is linked to their perception of time. The importance the respondents gave to temporality convinced us to focus on this. During the second phase, we developed conceptual categories that relate to the themes of temporality and meaning and which repeatedly appear in the collected material. The different meanings given to entrepreneurial activity according to the perception of time constitute our first-order categories (keep busy, escape existential questions, have fun, combat lethargy, be efficient, pursue an ethical goal, do one's job well, have unexpected encounters, and be creative), which we reorganized into broader second-order categories, labeled as follows: (1) acceptance of time acceleration; (2) participation in time acceleration; and (3) resistance to time acceleration. We captured the diversity of discursive approaches to temporality and meaning that the interviewees give to their work as entrepreneurs. The next section presents these empirical findings.

Results

All the interviewees admit that they have observed an increase in the pace of work and suffer from a lack of time: "Time is the issue" (#32). However, the meaning of their activity differs

according to their attitude toward the acceleration of time. Some respondents express acceptance of the fast pace of work that enables them to give a particular meaning to their entrepreneurial activity. Others report participating in this more rapid pace of working life in order to be efficient, and others reflect on resistance to the acceleration of time, which enables them to give a completely different, more qualitative meaning to their activity.

Acceptance of time acceleration and meaningful entrepreneurship

Many respondents have a fatalistic attitude toward accepting the lack of time available and consider frenzy and speed as inherent characteristics of entrepreneurial activity: “The most valuable resource for an entrepreneur is time. The second thing is money. But the first thing is time” (#38).

Entrepreneurship as a way to keep busy

Some entrepreneurs describe work as a way to avoid downtime and keep busy: “It is an occupation because otherwise you have nothing to do; you’re not an idle person and you like to work” (#47). The objective of work is to be active and not passive: “After a while, I had to do something. Clearly, I couldn’t remain passive” (#32). These excerpts show that work may be experienced as an “occupation” that acts as a barrier against the feeling of wasting time. Some interviewees express the same idea in a more explicit way, stating that “work serves as a way of not being bored” (#4) and that “work is a means of not being bored” (#14). One interviewee humorously tells us that because of his fear of boredom, he would not consider stopping work: “I was once asked the question: ‘If you won the lottery, would you stop working?’ I answered, ‘Well, the first thought that comes to mind is yes. But then I think, after a while, I’d get bored’” (#14).

Some interviewees view holidays as a useless period of time and see work as a way to put an end to that discomfort: “In the summer when I go on holiday, after three weeks, my wife says ‘Ah, it feels like you want to go home.’ And it’s true that after two weeks I’ve had enough” (#44).

Entrepreneurship as a way to escape existential questions

Some entrepreneurs acknowledge that they associate the feeling of being unproductive with depression, which they try to forget by working harder: “When I am at home and have nothing to do, I feel bad” (#18). Similarly, one interviewee considers work “not as an aspiration” but as “a *sine qua non*, that is, I’m really bad when I’m not working” (#24).

It is the fear not only of emptiness but also of being overwhelmed by existential questions that leads some entrepreneurs to take refuge in intense work and consider it as therapy: “Don’t think about anything else. It’s a bit like that. I need to work because if I don’t work, first of all, I’m bored, but, secondly, worse than that, I get depressed” (#47).

Entrepreneurship as a way to have fun

On a more positive note, some interviewees describe work as a way to have fun. These entrepreneurs may experience rapid pace or agitation as a source of exhilaration, providing a welcome distraction to the boredom that they fear. Time is not wasted when it is used for entertainment:

Work: It is something that allows us to pass the time and, in the society in which we live, to earn our living. That’s why I want it to be as much fun as possible. I don’t want to get bored (#22).

Participation in time acceleration and meaningful entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship as a way to combat lethargy

Some interviewees strive to avoid a form of boredom that they associate with the inertia of large companies. One respondent vehemently rejects the slow functioning of large groups:

In fact, I even tend to think that large groups should be broken up ... It's not the idea of destroying them for the sake of destroying them. It's the idea that they're too slow as structures. And it's really dangerous (#24).

Some explain that this slowness is due to a multiplication of processes that seem to be inadequate: "Even in a small department of twenty people, to buy a ballpoint pen, I needed two signatures from Paris. So, it was a bit boring" (#52).

A younger entrepreneur, who had worked in a large group during an internship at a leading high technology company, notes that the work there "wasn't going fast enough" (#13). He wanted a "more liberated" environment, to "go faster," and "focus on what is interesting." Such slow activity may be coupled with inconsistency, as the top managers at large companies tend to dissociate communication on values from actual activities: "And it's difficult for them, holding meetings about values, highlighting the company's values, trying to get them applied ... It is extremely complicated. There's inertia" (#16).

In describing this fear of inertia, some interviewees talk about sleep and even lethargy. For example, one respondent noted that he had "fallen asleep" in his former position at a major retail company and had lost "five or six years" before taking the entrepreneurial step:

I'll put it another way: I clung too much to a certain comfort level in the job, and I think I lost some years of my life, clinging to a condition, or a comfort, in which fundamentally I was not well. But here's the thing: It's the environment that puts you to sleep, that put me to sleep (#11).

Similarly, after ten years in a large technology company, another interviewee says he had changed from “the lethargic, wait-and-see state to that of someone who takes control of their life” by deciding to become an entrepreneur:

So, I'm going to be provocative: going from the lethargic state to the dynamic state, that's what I'm fighting for today. This propensity not to try to do a little thing in your corner, and therefore this propensity to find the first five negative reasons why you shouldn't do it ... I think my ultimate goal is really to change that state of mind (#9).

Entrepreneurship as a way to be efficient

Unsurprisingly, most interviewees praise the development of the digital industry for “making decisions in an hour,” “saving time” (#41), and increasing performance. Fearful of wasting time, these respondents seem to actively participate in the acceleration of time. Indeed, this characteristic frenzy of most entrepreneurs' work may generate a compulsion to work even harder: “I really am a workaholic. I'm really, really, really, really, really, really a workaholic” (#24). One interviewee is quite explicit about his desire to move forward as quickly as possible, viewing movement and acceleration as natural phenomena:

We're very committed to getting things moving as quickly as possible. Things are going to change anyway. After a while, things evolve. After a while, a glass breaks. After a while, the fork gets dirty. At last, things evolve naturally (#18).

He sets himself the goal of avoiding downtime and of constantly operating at a fast pace:

I read a lot. I use Google News. Now I've bought an app that allows me to read the news much faster and to sort through the news rapidly. You see here, today, I have four hundred and eighty-nine articles. I think I'll have about the same number tonight. I have about a thousand a day ... It's very easy. I'm skipping from one to another; I'm skipping ...

because I'm looking for keywords. I've been practicing my speed reading. Time to me is a weapon. Well, a tool: that's more accurate (#18).

This interviewee has difficulty understanding those who do not appear to experience acceleration as a professional requirement:

I want it to go faster. In fact, I say to myself: Do people want to change the world, to change society, to change the way they do things? And, in fact, I'm at odds with people who say to themselves: Well, no, but I'm really happy in that situation. Because I don't want to be happy in that situation (#18).

Another interviewee explains that entrepreneurial activity is more a life choice than a career choice, and refuses to distinguish between his professional and personal lives:

When I go to bed, I told you earlier, I sometimes wake up and work. In fact, I work all the time, but I never work. Because what I do is part of my life. If I don't do it, I'll be very bored. The most boring time, actually, is train-time, commuting. But I take advantage of that time to do things (#36).

Some respondents consider that this race against time is mainly initiated by younger people who are more likely to seek the meaning of their work in the speed of its execution: "In the past, people preferred to be quiet. Everything was going well. That was cool. It was rather cozy. Everybody was fine. But now the young people, they don't want that. They're bored. And they feel bad (#41).

Some interviewees seek to justify their attachment to the fast pace of work by observing that timeliness is the sole or, at least, the main criterion for the quality of work: "And an example, in my profession, we do sprints, two weeks long. If after two weeks, the work is done within the allotted time, well, for me, it's a job well done" (#8).

Others justify the speed of execution as a way to bring products and services to market before their competitors. According to one interviewee, while large companies may fear commercial failure and a deterioration of their image and will carry out numerous tests before acting, smaller companies may take the risk of creating the product in order to offer it for sale more quickly: “We sell a thousand of them, then we go to the factory to create the product. It enables us to go much faster” (#13).

Resistance to time acceleration and meaningful entrepreneurship

Some interviewees describe the race against time as “a constant battle” (#25) and “the biggest enemy” (#30), and regret that “time passes infinitely faster for us than for others” (#25). They express the idea that suspending this frenzy is less a waste of time and source of boredom and more a way to achieve serenity: “Before, I only took an hour for myself and I felt guilty. Today, if I give myself a day, I don’t feel guilty. I’m going to go for a walk in the forest and I’m going to be fine” (#24).

One interviewee evokes the profoundly human need to alternate times of action and times of meditation, or at least times of suspension of activity:

I really fundamentally think one thing: Humans are not meant to work eight hours a day on a regular basis. I believe that we are made to have moments when the brain is boiling, and when we can say “Eureka,” and moments of great pause and contemplation (#25).

Being more critical, a few interviewees regret the eagerness and excitement that most workers display within the entrepreneurial context:

What surprised me the most? What surprised me the most was the effervescence, the permanent stress, the communication in all directions, and sometimes a little too much, a little too rushed, and that brings no good except marketing. We’re speeding up. It’s this

overbidding where you always have to be the most present, the one who speaks the loudest, the most represented, to be in front of everyone. This explosion on social networks. This overdose, which I can't control ... This sense of urgency. I was surprised to see everyone flapping all over the place, looking for the slightest event (#41).

Appreciating that a state of frenzy is not the only way to give meaning to their work, these entrepreneurs view deceleration of time as a way to pursue an ethical goal, do their job well, have unexpected encounters, or be creative.

Entrepreneurship as a way to pursue an ethical goal

Some interviewees, rather than participating in a race against time, emphasize that they want to spend time on setting and pursuing altruistic goals. For example, one respondent expressed a wish to be recognized for fair trade, even if this demands patience and hard work:

Our goal is to become a label, an ethical and fair-trade label. This is our goal. And it's going to take us a lot of time ... a lot of effort, and a lot of trouble. But hey, that's what we want and that's what we're going to achieve (#33).

One interviewee explains how periods of observation and suspension of activity during a trip abroad made him aware of certain societal needs and reinforced his mission in the energy sector:

When, in the evening, I was on a hill in Conakry and I observed the different neighborhoods, they turn one off because they don't have enough energy, they turn one on again. If there's a football match in Guinea, when they switch off a neighborhood, people go out, they break everything. Because they don't see the end of the game. Something crazy, and so there we rediscover problems which were twelve thousand kilometers away (#52).

Entrepreneurship as a way to do things well

Some interviewees are used to taking “time to do things properly” (#41). They criticize the search for overquality that prevents them from doing their job well and, in so doing, from making sense of their entrepreneurial activity:

When you're running around, one of the first feelings you get is that you're not doing a good job. Because when you have forty tasks at the same time, you're going to get to the essential. For me, a job well done is having the time to do it and then to do it well in all its aspects, in all its details, etc. (#12).

This interviewee even expresses regret about the amount of time he spent working for a large industrial group listed on the CAC 40 (French stock market) to ensure the quality of the work:

In fact, coming from the technical side, I liked it when a program was well done, even putting in a few extra tricks that would please the client ... I also liked it when everything was well tested beforehand, and so on (#12).

Entrepreneurship as a way to experience unexpected encounters

Meeting others may be viewed not as a waste of time, but rather as a fruitful experience, even from the viewpoint of efficiency and quality of work: “We met at Roissy on his return from the United States. I was coming back from Helsinki. We had dinner together. These are privileged moments. There was a good fit” (#49). This extract shows the importance of seizing opportunities to meet others and to be open to the unknown, thus encouraging the emergence of new projects or reflections. One interviewee underlines the benefits for his company of an unexpected meeting in Poland:

And then, by chance, one evening, I was in Poland and the aftersales manager calls me. Fortunately, he said this ... before hanging up ... : “You must be warm because I'm freezing.” I said, “Where are you?” He said, “I'm in Warsaw.” I said, “Look, I'm one

hundred kilometers from Warsaw. I'm taking a detour. I'll meet you there." We met at the Novotel in Warsaw and that's where the project was able to emerge (#52).

Entrepreneurship as a way to be creative

Some interviewees describe the suspension of frenzy as a necessary transition to make creative choices. One respondent humorously refers to non-productive times as drivers for creative action:

Anyway, in human history, which is not new, we haven't always worked the way we work. The hunter-gatherers of ten thousand years ago, it is proven that they worked two to three hours a day maximum. After that, they did nothing. That's why they made beautiful paintings in Lascaux: They didn't care about anything else (#22).

Some interviewees take advantage of periods of loneliness and boredom to develop their creativity: "I start in my car, alone. In my car, I imagine the range of decisions alone ... Decisions, ideas, potential ideas come in" (#22). Others recount that the entrepreneurial project itself emerges at a time of suspended frenzy, showing that it is necessary to experience a period of deceleration of time in order to find inspiration and be creative:

We went to China for two months. There was a bit of a labor crisis in 2009. So, we left and said to ourselves: We'll find an idea, we'll find a project, and we'll be able to launch our company when we get back (#31).

Table 2 summarizes the different time and meaning perspectives of the entrepreneurs.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

Many interviewees say that they accept the acceleration of time, considering their entrepreneurial activity as a way to keep busy, forget unpleasant feelings, or have fun. They seem to experience what Pascal (2018, p. 40) calls entertainment, which consists of becoming more active in order to stifle existential questions: “Hence it comes that men so much love noise and stir”. Some interviewees even participate in this acceleration, which they see as a necessary instrument of work quality and performance, even if they acknowledge that this participation prevents them from spending time making the organizational choices that suit them. In both cases, the interviewees seem to endure the present, what Lévesque and Stephan (2020) call a present-fatalistic time perspective, which leads them to submit to time pressure in order to achieve as much as possible in a given period, and to create meaningful entrepreneurship based on a quantitative perception of time and work.

Other interviewees resist the acceleration of time, reporting that they are able to give another meaning to entrepreneurial activity. For them, these periods of suspension of frenzy are not incompatible with the construction of meaning: On the contrary, they may be encouraged to give themselves time to set ethical objectives, do their job better, have unexpected encounters, and be creative. This new approach to meaningful entrepreneurship is based on what Lévesque and Stephan (2020) call a “sense of time influence,” whereby individuals take the time to do what makes the most sense to them. These results echo what Hartmut Rosa (2013, p. 11) refers to as a “way of living” that might be termed an “art of working” in organizations. We may feel bored or uncomfortable by these experiences of time deceleration, but simultaneously we may experience periods of resonance in which we are touched and transformed by a qualitative relationship to the world. Rosa (2019) observes that resonance is marked by a fundamental dimension of unavailability, which causes it to occur when it is not expected, especially during a perceived period of boredom. Such attention to the quality of work has been mentioned by

Simone Weil, according to whom “conscious” (1999, p. 331), “real” (1999, p. 332), and “non-mechanical” (1999, p. 330) work enables one to escape the Taylorian organization of work, which “empties the soul of everything that is not concerned with speed” (2002, p. 318): “Workers must be obliged to always keep in mind the guiding conception of the work they perform” (Weil 1999, p. 323, our translation). This approach to time consolidates the idea formulated by Frémeaux and Pavageau (2020) that workers need introspective time to identify what makes sense and the thesis that the experience of time deceleration can be a lever of meaning (Johnsen 2016).

Even with this approach, resistance to the acceleration of time is not exclusively a fruitful experience: It remains unpleasant but may be fruitful when tamed, that is, accepted. We find in Schopenhauer (1969) this paradoxical status of boredom: Although opposing the will to live and revealing the infinite emptiness of being, boredom frees us from certain illusions and reveals itself to be a path toward a new form of wisdom. Rather than considering experience of the deceleration of time as an unpleasant emotional state (Tsai 2016), we propose to define it as a transitory condition that may enable workers to question, transform, and renew the meaning they give to their work. It may be the path to a readjustment of activities, and it can also be the sign of a deeper, previously initiated reorientation, reminding workers that there are tasks to which they do not wish to pay attention, energy, and time, and other tasks that they wish to prioritize (Shin and Grant 2019).

Our study thus shows that the issue is not how organizations reduce downtime or promote slowness (Virilio 1986; Rosa 2013), but rather how they may help workers spend time choosing meaningful actions. Rather than focusing on accelerating the pace of work, organizations could focus on providing time and resources to enable workers to overcome their fear of being unproductive and to develop a qualitative relationship to work.

Our results also reveal that there are different types of narrative discourse on temporality. Such heterogeneity in talking about time may be linked to the number of individuals who view activity as having a palliative effect on the fear of being useless or, on the contrary, who consider it as a means of achieving altruistic ambitions. Our study shows, however, that the different discourses are not opposed: On the contrary, they may complement each other. Some interviewees seeking to escape the feeling of wasting their time, rushed into entrepreneurship, but, after periods of intense and effective work, now recognize the risks of overactivity (Fisher 1993; Tsai 2016) and the virtues of the deceleration of time. It may be that individuals who are in a position to question what really makes sense are able to develop a qualitative relationship with work and tame boredom, which may then prove to be transitory (Watson et al. 1988). If we consider that life oscillates not only between suffering and boredom, as Schopenhauer (1969) states, but also, more optimistically, between contribution to the common good and idleness, experiences of transitory boredom may act as a springboard for more ingrained choices in favor of the common good.

This examination of different positions in relation to the acceleration of time leads us to formulate the following recommendation: Rather than reducing downtime by accelerating task completion and limiting the fully shared exercise of employees' cognitive capacities—what Alvesson and Spicer (2012, p. 1204) have called stupidity management, organizations should practice effective time management (Lévesque and Stephan 2020) and encourage transient experiences of deceleration of time by providing introspective and deliberative periods, that allow workers to make sense of their work (Johnsen 2016; Frémeaux and Pavageau 2020). Building on our analysis of entrepreneurs' different perceptions of time, future research could take longitudinal approaches to examining the impact of organizational context on time perspectives and processes of meaning-making. For example, an adhocratic organization that pursues an accelerated pace of work and a relentless quest for novelty may become a source of

inefficiency and an impediment to a future positive ethical direction (Fischer, Brettel and Mauer, 2020). Mintzberg goes as far as to say that “the bureaucracies are all mass producers; they gain efficiency through standardization. The adhocracy is a custom producer, unable to standardize and so to be efficient. It gains its effectiveness (innovation) at the price of efficiency” (Mintzberg 1989, p. 218). Future studies could examine to what extent organizational choices designed to embrace or to reduce acceleration of time have a positive impact on the efficiency and quality of work.

Our study may also open new research perspectives on entrepreneurship as a means of meeting the challenges of global health, economic, social, and environmental crises. Entrepreneurship may be an appropriate response not only through encouraging the process of renewal and an organization of work oriented toward innovation, proactivity, competitive aggression, and risk-taking (Magdinceva-Spova et al. 2016) but also by allowing for the possibility of experiencing decelerated time and setting up a work organization oriented toward quality. The suspension of frenzy does not exclude the time for novelty because, as Mintzberg (1989) states, the driving force of change and innovation may rest in the deceleration of time or, at least, in achieving balance between periods of acceleration and deceleration (Virilio 1986): “Effective strategies can show up in the strangest places and develop through the most unexpected means... The natural propensity to experiment, or sometimes just boredom, likewise encourages strategic change” (Mintzberg 1989, p. 33). As such, our study provides an insight into different ways in which entrepreneurs may take advantage of deceleration time to create novelty while developing quality. Further studies could also analyze the emergence of start-up accelerators which, unlike business incubators, provide intensive mentoring and training, and expect start-ups to quickly become operational and to ‘graduate’ by a given short deadline (Crişan et al. 2021). Based on our analysis of perceptions of time, future research could question the relevance of accelerators, whose essential objective is to increase the speed of development of

entrepreneurial structures. It could also examine how accelerators and incubators may stimulate both a quantitative and a qualitative relationship to work.

Conclusion

The different perspectives of time adopted by the interviewees influence the way in which they construct meaningful entrepreneurship. Some respondents express a desire to accept the acceleration of time, leading them to view work as a way of keeping busy, forgetting, or having fun. Others reveal a wish to participate in an accelerating pace of life, enabling them to be effective in their activity as entrepreneurs. Finally, others demonstrate a desire to resist the acceleration of time and to tame seemingly unproductive time in order to set ethical goals, do their job better, have unexpected encounters, or be creative.

With governments imposing Covid-19 containment measures, a significant proportion of humanity has experienced constrained suspension of frenzy. These periods of suspension may only be a source of meaningfulness when the societal context is sufficiently calm to enable individuals to maintain a qualitative relationship with the world. Similarly, in the organizational context, these periods of deceleration of time may only enable individuals to find deeper meaning in their work if they can escape excessive pressure. Our study invites entrepreneurs (and, more generally, business leaders) to devote space (or give workers the opportunity) to experience decelerated time in order to be more attentive to the quality of their work and to better observe the society they are transforming. Thus, workers may discover, as the philosopher Mark Hawkins has said, that boredom, when associated with periods of suspension of frenzy, is “a type of space,” not an “empty space,” but a “space which is actually full of limitless potential” (Hawkins 2016, p. 8).

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Table 1. Sample composition

| Respondent | Time spent as an entrepreneur (years) | Gender | Age (years) | Sector |
|-------------------|--|---------------|--------------------|---|
| #01 | 0 | Woman | 35 | E-commerce |
| #02 | 0 | Man | 32 | E-finance |
| #03 | 1 | Man | 34 | Consulting in organization and entrepreneurship |
| #04 | 1 | Man | 31 | Services |
| #05 | 1 | Man | 42 | Entertainment (health) |
| #06 | 1 | Woman | 30 | Logistics for health |
| #07 | 1 | Man | 27 | Recruitment |
| #08 | 1 | Man | 27 | HR (IT) |
| #09 | 1 | Man | 27 | Textiles |
| #10 | 1 | Woman | 40 | Building |
| #11 | 1 | Man | 28 | Building |
| #12 | 1.5 | Man | 41 | IT (big data for industry) |
| #13 | 2 | Man | 56 | Logistics |
| #14 | 2 | Man | 26 | Entertainment/sport |
| #15 | 2 | Woman | 30 | Personal services |
| #16 | 2.5 | Man | 39 | IT, security |
| #17 | 3 | Woman | 28 | Services (events) |
| #18 | 3 | Man | 29 | Robotics |
| #19 | 3 | Man | 33 | Organic food |
| #20 | 3 | Man | 38 | E-finance |
| #21 | 3 | Woman | 30 | Tourism |
| #22 | 3 | Man | 48 | Building |
| #23 | 3 | Man | 46 | Energy |
| #24 | 4 | Man | 41 | Consulting, coaching |
| #25 | 4 | Man | 34 | IT, security |
| #26 | 5 | Woman | 31 | HR |
| #27 | 5 | Man | 28 | E-commerce |
| #28 | 5 | Man | 31 | Entertainment |
| #29 | 5 | Man | 34 | Entertainment |
| #30 | 6.5 | Man | 38 | Security |
| #31 | 7 | Man | 29 | Transportation |
| #32 | 8 | Man | 31 | Marketing |
| #33 | 8 | Man | 37 | Fair trade |
| #34 | 8 | Man | 53 | Building sector |
| #35 | 9 | Man | 38 | Services (transport) |
| #36 | 9 | Man | 34 | Computing |
| #37 | 9 | Man | 52 | Education |
| #38 | 10 | Man | 42 | Infrastructure maintenance |
| #39 | 10 | Man | 56 | Insurance |
| #40 | 12 | Man | 42 | Entertainment |
| #41 | 13 | Man | 31 | Software for organizations |
| #42 | 13 | Woman | 40 | Personal services |
| #43 | 13 | Man | 46 | Building |
| #44 | 13 | Man | 43 | Education |
| #45 | 17 | Man | 45 | Building (health) |
| #46 | 19 | Woman | 53 | Education |
| #47 | 21 | Man | 43 | Entertainment |
| #48 | 21 | Man | 58 | Energy |
| #49 | 21 | Man | 50 | Textiles |
| #50 | 22 | Man | 58 | Services |
| #51 | 23 | Man | 63 | Logistics |
| #52 | 25 | Man | 56 | Energy |
| #53 | 28 | Man | 64 | Manufacturing |
| #54 | 30 | Man | 52 | Manufacturing |

Table 2. Time and meaning perspectives of the entrepreneurs with illustrative data examples

| Second-order categories | First-order categories | Illustrative data examples |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Acceptance of acceleration of time | Keep busy | “It is an occupation because otherwise you have nothing to do” (#47). |
| | Escape existential questions | “When I have nothing to do, I feel bad” (#18). |
| | Have fun | “Work ... I want it to be as much fun as possible” (#22). |
| Participation in acceleration of time | Combat lethargy | “Going from the lethargic state to the dynamic state” (#9). |
| | Be efficient | “We’re very committed to getting things moving as quickly as possible” (#18). |
| Resistance to acceleration of time | Pursue an ethical goal | “Our goal is to become a label ... And it’s going to take us a lot of time ... But hey, that’s what we want” (#33). |
| | Do one’s job well | “Time to do things properly” (#41). |
| | Have unexpected encounters | “These are privileged moments. There was a good fit” (#49). |
| | Be creative | “I imagine the range of decisions alone ... Decisions, ideas, potential ideas come in” (#22). |